78103-1184 Martha Bailey

June 1, 1977

PARK PLAZA: URBAN DESIGN IN PRACTICE

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

Introduction

Park Plaza, a multi-use development project in downtown Boston, is now on the brink of realization. Strategically located at the southern edge of Boston's historic Common and Public Garden (figs. 1 and 2), Park Plaza is one of the most controversial developments proposed in the city's modern history. It has, over its six-year history, reflected the changes in attitude and approach of local governments with regard to redevelopment, environmental review, and community participation. In particular, Park Plaza offers a unique and innovative example of the urban design process at its most sophisticated - and its most pragmatic.

The initial development proposal for Park Plaza selected by the Boston Redevelopment Authority in 1971 (fig. 3) consisted of nearly 6 million square feet of space on 10 acres of land. The project included an internal, multi-level mall running the length of two city blocks; elevated plazas; and five towers ranging in height from 250 to 550 feet, all rising from a second-level "podium." Three towers would be residential, one an office structure, and the third would house a hotel. Also to be built were 3,000 parking spaces, along with an underground servicing system. The 1971 Park Plaza was self-contained and self-sufficient, tying into the city's public transit and utility systems and benefiting from proximity to the surrounding business, retail and residential districts, but otherwise having little relationship to existing Boston. The project was skillfully put together and would undoubtedly have provided a marvelous internal environment. But it was, in fact, a perfect example of the planning notions current in the 1960's, notions which emphasized megastructure cities, or giant buildings as cities, internally coherent, yet also the first link in what would be the new order of urban development.

The Park Plaza of 1976 is quite different (fig. 4). It is concerned with integrating new development into the existing city, knitting in pedestrian routes, spaces and masses with the surrounding neighborhoods. It is less than half the size of the initial project, provides for retention of existing structures, and attempts to conform to Boston as it is. It is safe, cautious, and responds to present realities rather than imposing new ideals.

The new Park Plaza has only one tower, whose height is limited to 300 feet. It includes a luxury, low-rise hotel of 450 rooms, and parking for 850 cars, provided through expansion of an existing parking garage. A low-rise office building of 125 feet high is located along Boylston

GOVDOC
BRA
4665

Street between Arlington Street and Hadassah Way (the first plan had proposed a high-rise structure 450 feet high at essentially the same location), and a State Transportation Building of 600,000 square feet, with a maximum height of 145 feet, is to be built along Charles Street. Also included are a public plaza at grade of 65,000 square feet and the 300-unit luxury apartment tower, to be built on the southern edge of the plaza (away from the Boston Public Garden). Several pedestrian pathways cut through the project from north to south (the original pedestrian axis had run east-west); the sequence of spaces attempts to correspond to Boston's traditional arrangement of enclosure (square) and continuity (street).

Between 1971 and 1976 a remarkable process took place, in which the initial project was rejected - not once, but three times - by the state government; a civic advisory committee of concerned residents, businesses, and environmental groups was formed to participate in an advisory role in the replanning of the project; the environmental review process took on a much more decisive role than it had ever done in the past; and the function of the urban design process in the planning of a major downtown development assumed monumental proportions.

The professional design work carried out between the two projects was unique in many respects. It was carried out in a highly charged political atmosphere. It involved a planning process in reverse, which started with a finished product - the initial project, entered into an Environmental Impact Statement with nothing to make a statement about (since the project had been rejected), and only then was able to start moving forward with a serious restudy.

Park Plaza became, by default, an exercise in total planning. The political controversy surrounding the project required that a planning effort be mounted to reassure the public about the validity of the proposal. Park Plaza is as planned as the state of the art permits. In fact, it has been suggested that if the Park Plaza-associated paper work and documentation were to be heaped in the project area, the height of the pile would exceed the allowable limits.

The 1971 Plan

In 1970 the Boston Redevelopment Authority advertised in local papers as well as the New York Times and Wall Street Journal for development proposals for a renewal project they called "Park Plaza." This was a 30-acre section of downtown Boston (fig. 1 and 2) that fronted on the Boston Common and Public Garden, and abutted the Back Bay, a residential and commercial district that includes some of the city's finest 19th century architecture; Bay Village, another small 19th century enclave; and the city's Chinese community. Within the boundaries of Park Plaza were Park Square, the congested location of several major bus terminals; much open space devoted to streets and parking;

numerous commercial buildings of various ages, historical importance, and structural conditions; two theaters that are part of the city's theater district; and the infamous "Combat Zone," Boston's adult entertainment district.

The impetus for Park Plaza came from the fact that several potentially large developments were being contemplated by various property owners within the area. An opportunity was perceived to rationalize an inefficient street pattern, optimize the benefits to the city in terms of guiding desirable uses, and impose order on a rundown and chaotic (but strategically located) section of the city. Boston would do this through the creation of an urban renewal project that would give the city considerably more control over development than it would have if private developers were to go their own course. Since Federal urban renewal funds were not available to "write down" the land costs of such a project (the Federal government had in 1968 withdrawn all commitments to future funding of downtown renewal efforts), the "carrot" for the large-scale development was the fact that the BRA would use its eminent domain powers to assemble land for the development. The developer would reimburse in full all acquisition costs, but total costs could be expected to be lower than they would be in the private market. Further, the city would pay for the costs of major public improvements, primarily new streets and utilities. In essence, Park Plaza took a new approach to the kind of renewal that had been done under earlier Federal programs; it was large-scale redevelopment, but without Federal financial assistance.

For eminent domain to be applied, however, the Park Plaza urban renewal plan would have to be approved by the Massachusetts Department of Community Affairs, because the BRA's condemnation powers derive from State legislation.

At the same time, the actual renewal plan for Park Plaza was sketchy, the intent being to formalize a detailed plan with whichever developer was selected, in order to assure feasibility despite the lack of a land write-down. In other words, the BRA and the developer would work out together a plan that would satisfy both the public goals in terms of land use and design and private requirements as to return on investment.

The city's need to expand a relatively small tax base and to alleviate unemployment in the construction industry, and a developer's desire to maximize the income potential of the land appeared to be well met by a large-scale development project for Park Plaza. And that was what was sought.

Five developer/architect teams submitted proposals:

- First Realty Company with Wilheim Von Moltke and Richard White.

- Sprague Industries, Inc., with Sert, Jackson & Associates.
- Nassif-Westinghouse with Edward Durell Stone.
- Cabot, Cabot & Forbes, with The Architects Collaborative.
- Boston Urban Associates, with Davis, Brody & Associates.

All the submissions proposed major high-rise developments which accorded with both the BRA's design guidelines and the perception of any developer wishing to maximize the use of the development site. Because of the general nature of the renewal plan at that point, submissions were more a measure of competence of the respective teams than a precise definition of what would be built.

Boston Urban Associates (developers)/Davis Brody Associates (architects) were selected. With a specific developer and a specific proposal, an urban renewal plan could now be worked out.

The urban renewal plan as submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Community Affairs included controls able to accommodate the Boston Urban/Davis Brody proposed project and a specific roads and utility improvement plan. The plan called for initial development - Phase I - in the blocks between Arlington and Tremont Streets and provided for a Phase II area, the "Combat Zone." Phase II is Boston's Adult Entertainment area. When Phase I development was completed, it was thought Phase II would become desirable as a development area; at that point proposals would be submitted, developers designated and one of Boston's most "blighted" areas would be eradicated. (Like Phase I, Phase II has since been rethought. The approach is now toward containment of adult entertainment, rather than eradication; street improvements; better policing; and infill redevelopment rather than complete clearance.)

The package of controls, public improvements, and the letter of intent (embryonic legal commitments, time schedules, security deposits, etc., between the BRA and developer) then began its journey through city and State approving agencies. The plan was approved first in 1971 by the BRA Board, then by the Boston City Council. The latter wrote in additional clauses to strengthen the likelihood that the Combat Zone would be developed: the developer for Phase I would be obligated to submit a proposal for Phase II.

Then in June 1972, the submission to the DCA was rejected. In order to approve the project DCA was required to make positive findings on the following criteria:

(1) The area would develop only by the exercise of governmental powers.

(2) The proposal is consistent with the sound needs of the locality.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from
Boston Public Library

http://www.archive.org/details/parkplazaurbande00bost

(3) The financial plan is sound.

(4) The area is substandard, or blighted.

(5) The plan is sufficiently complete.

DCA made a positive finding only on item 1, and then only because the Combat Zone was included in the plan.

Public controversy from many quarters had been mounting steadily concurrent with the DCA's lengthy processing of the submission. The strategic location of Park Plaza in relation to Boston's residential neighborhoods is emphasized by a zoning map (fig. 5) which shows the high-density Park Plaza thrust into the surrounding historic residential neighborhoods of Bay Village, Back Bay and Beacon Hill. Legislation in 1956 and 1962 respectively protected Beacon Hill and Back Bay from major redevelopment. The middle-class constituency of downtown residents, anxious to conserve the environment of these neighborhoods in which they had chosen to live, began to organize. Construction workers concerned with a declining industry also began to organize, but as proponents of Park Plaza. In July 1972 the hard-hats showed political muscle by marching on the State House.

The same plan was submitted to DCA a second time in November 1972, but amplified by a brief Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The submission was again rejected. The Commissioner of Community Affairs who had been responsible for the two rejections resigned. A third submission, with greater back-up data, was made to the newly appointed Commissioner in June 1973. He did, in fact, conditionally approve the third submission, but the conditions proved to be unacceptable to the BRA and to the developer. A fourth try was made; this submission included a work program for a complete EIS and a work program for a Building Mass Study. The former had been drawn up by outside consultants, Saratoga Associates, and the latter by professionals within the by now very well organized Civic Advisory Committee (CAC) which acted as an umbrella group for all interested parties.

The fourth submission marked the turn-around point for the Park Plaza "approval industry." New procedures were evolving, a structure for subsequent work was forming. Political and administrative proponents of the project realized that substantial work was necessary. Although the fourth submission was conditionally approved, final approval (necessary for the actual execution of the project) was subject to the satisfactory completion of the work programs included in the submission. To facilitate this process, DCA provided a major share of the funding necessary for the EIS and also made funding available to the CAC which allowed the committee to hire their own professional consultant. The CAC hired Justin Gray Associates, a planning firm experienced at articulating community needs.

An intense period of procedural negotiations ensued. The CAC and the BRA worked out a contract in which the CAC would not exceed their title and would indeed remain as an "advisory body" without formal approval powers. (Informal approval powers, however, were exploited to the full through the local State Representative and contacts in the State hierarchy.)

By this point, consultants had been appointed, the citizens had organized, and environmental issues had been identified. Political forces were allayed, at least until the EIS had run its course. For the first time since the initial conceptual phase, Park Plaza was back in the hands of design professionals.

The BRA Urban Design Department started working intensively on the project, the immediate concern being to provide something for the environmental consultants to test. Environmental law requires "alternatives to proposed action" to be evaluated, which is usually an invitation for strawmen alternatives. It was this requirement, however, which provided the key to the future of the Park Plaza plan. In response to the EIS requirements, the original plan and its project were presumed null and void. A completely fresh look was given to the area and its design and development framework.

The Restudy

The first task of the Park Plaza Restudy was to establish a planning framework for the area. Concerns focused on three major categories: (1) circulation, open space and retail use distribution; (2) bulk; and (3) existing conditions. In each category, the original solution was re-evaluated and a more desirable and appropriate alternative defined, discussed, and generally agreed upon by the BRA and CAC.

Circulation, open space and retail use distribution:

The 1971 plan (fig. 6) emphasized a major east/west internal pedestrian system, which duplicated pedestrian movement along Boylston and Stuart Streets. To be successful, the route would need a great deal of adjoining activity, such as shops and restaurants, to sustain it. Further, the route was elevated above street level along much of its length, effectively blocking desirable north/south pedestrian movement.

The restudy (fig. 7) suggested that pedestrians should move through the project at grade level, with paths (pedestrian easements) located to correspond with maximum pedestrian need. Two new north/south paths are created, one linking the spine of Bay Village (Church Street) with the Boston Public Garden, and the other linking Boylston Place with Warrenton Street, a route which ties into Boston's legitimate theater district and its theater-associated restaurants.

The 1971 plan located open spaces on the second-level podium, from which all the high-rise structures would rise, an approach now discredited by the isolation and barrier to adjoining districts created by the podium of the Prudential Center in Boston's Back Bay. In contrast, the restudy recommended open space at grade level, as a complement to the Boston Common and Public Garden, but set off from these green spaces so as not to become extensions that would alter the configuration and atmosphere of these historic parks. The result is a contained plaza within the project, to provide a focal point for surrounding development.

The 1971 proposal concentrated retail uses in an internal mall abutting and parallel to Boylston Street between Arlington and New Charles Street. In the restudy, retail is distributed at grade throughout the project area and oriented to either street or plaza. Particular emphasis is given to upgrading the economically depressed Stuart Street area through the injection of more retail uses.

The 1971 plan included a new street running from Stuart to Arlington Street, called New Providence Street. Through vehicular circulation is taken right out of the project area in the restudy by the elimination of this street. The elimination of a street is a simple and worthy objective, but it is difficult to achieve, given the inadequate capacity of Boston's old street system. As the restudy and the EIS progressed, data became available that made it possible to re-assess the loadings of the effected streets and to recommend the elimination of New Providence Street with some conviction.

Bulk:

The 1971 plan (fig. 8) allowed towers to a maximum height of 650 feet (later amended to 450 feet). The Boylston Street frontage was restricted to a height of 125 feet and a setback height of 155 feet, which were established by heights of existing commercial buildings fronting the Common and Public Garden and adjacent to the project area. The principle of limiting Boylston Street frontage heights was undermined, however, by the allowance of two towers of 450 feet each, one at the junction of Arlington and Boylston Streets and the other at the junction of New Charles and Boylston Streets. Elsewhere in the project area there was no restriction on the number of towers.

The restudy restricted the number of towers to one, with a maximum height of 300 feet and located in the center of the project area. The Stuart Street frontage was restricted by setbacks similar to those on Boylston Street (fig. 9).* The periphery of the project area now more or less conformed to the scale of the surrounding neighborhoods. The controversial shadow-casting towers on Boylston Street and abutting the Public Garden were eliminated; the remaining tower was located mid-block.

Existing Conditions:

Redundant roads, surface parking lots, a bus station, one-story bar buildings and inefficient parking garages cluster around Park Square itself (fig. 10) and the area thus defined is in obvious need of renewal. Also, all the necessary street and pedestrian improvements for the entire project (construction of New Charles Street, widening of Stuart Street, and construction of pedestrian easements) can be carried out within this area. It is for this core area that the restudy recommended redevelopment as absolutely necessary. The restudy concluded that if land outside this area is to be acquired by eminent domain for purposes of private redevelopment, then such acquisition and proposed redevelopment should be very carefully considered in terms of value to the city, feasibility and architectural merit, in comparison to the buildings that new development would be replacing. Buildings, or groups of buildings, outside the core area range in merit from the admirable Saxon Theater on Tremont Street (fig. 19) to the "Piano Row" buildings along Boylston Street fronting the Public Garden.

With the clarification of a new set of planning goals, it was possible to begin the more difficult task of working out a strategy for achieving the objectives.

Making It Work

The basic issue of the Park Plaza controversy had always been density. The developer had contended that the overall high density was necessary to both absorb the total land costs of the area and to create a unique environment that would justify the premium rents necessary to support financing. Rather than disputing these contentions, the restudy attempted to isolate the basic assumptions behind them and then determine whether these assumptions necessarily led to a high density proposal.

The latter contention, that only high density could provide an environment unique enough to be marketed at higher than average rentals, was beginning to be undermined by the assumptions implicit in the planning goals - that a better environment had as much marketing appeal as an entirely new and different environment. The former contention, however, that econmic feasibility was dependent on the proposed 6 million sq. ft. of floor area of the initial project proved to be a more difficult problem to unravel.

In a publicly sponsored project such as Park Plaza, a judgment has to be made by the sponsoring agency that economic feasibility of the project proceeding is not so minimal as to seriously jeopardize the possibility of the project, yet does not contain an excessive contingency factor which could mask the potential for above average profits by the developer. This is a difficult judgment to make as the validity of

financial analysis is dependent on the correct assignment of values to the variables of expected rentals, interest rates and construction costs - variables which are very hard to predict for construction up to seven years away. In the case of the initial project, financial analysis showed that at least it was not incorrect to conclude that if the full project area of 10 acres were to be acquired, at an estimated cost of $26 million, then between 5.5 and 6 million square feet of floor area would have to be developed to bring a high enough return to absorb that cost i.e., if the profits were fixed at a reasonable margin then calculation showed that the variables of rentals, interest rates and constructions costs were generally within the range accepted by the development community. It was decided, therefore, not to further question the variables or assign more optimistic values to them, but to accept the developer's figures and make the land costs the variable. Thus, if the land area, and so land costs, were reduced, then the overall redeveloped square footage could be reduced. And if land costs could be redistributed within the area, so could building bulk, so that high-rise elements would not necessarily have to be located on the highest priced land. The manipulation of the relationship between development and land cost absorption was the nub of the restudy.

Land costs were thoroughly analyzed and mapped. Costs included acquisition, relocation of tenants, and demolition of buildings. These costs were aggregated into three major parcels running north/south between Boylston and Stuart Streets, which were in turn broken into sub-parcels showing the comparative land costs between the two streets (fig. 11). The sub-parcels along Boylston Street cost more than the sub-parcels along Stuart Street, reflecting the greater desirability of the Boylston Street location. However, if each of the major parcels is developed as suggested by the restudy, then the highrise element necessary to absorb the land costs can be located in the middle of the parcel - as required by the planning objectives - and not just abutting Boylston Street as would be the case if the high-cost Boylston Street sub-parcel were developed on its own. Another effect of this new north/south parcelization is that Stuart Street is guaranteed development concurrent with the development of Boylston Street. It is the run-down Stuart Street that is most in need of revitalization and renewal.

In the 1971 parcelization (fig. 12), Parcels 1 and 2 were divided along Columbus Avenue. To absorb the high land costs of Parcel 1, one or two high-rise towers were indeed necessary on the Boylston Street frontage.

Financial feasibility of lower density alternatives was achieved by omitting various sub-parcels from the area of land to be redeveloped.

> 6 million sq.ft. of development absorbs $26 million of land cost spread over the entire area.

5 million sq.ft. of development absorbs $19.5 million of land cost; this excludes the Saxon Theater sub-parcel and assumes a rehabilitated Motor Mart Garage as opposed to a newly built parking facility.

4 million sq.ft. of development absorbs $14.4 million of land cost and is achieved by additionally excluding the Arlington/Boylston sub-parcel.

3 million sq.ft. of development absorbs $11.2 million of land cost and only covers the land included in the definition of the "core area." The land area is further reduced by exclusion of the Piano Row sub-parcel.

2 million sq.ft. of development absorbs $5.3 million of land cost and assumes that only the present empty lots are developed to the allowable FAR.

The 2 million square foot development could occur with no public action (eminent domain or public improvements). It was thus defined as the "no-build" alternative. Although the density of this scheme is low, little or no public benefit would accrue from it.

The 3 million square foot development, on the other hand, was beginning to emerge as the minimum feasible scheme that would eliminate blight and allow for the necessary public improvements.

Each of the development alternatives was worked out as a specific scheme. Each scheme responded as much as possible to the restudy planning objectives, although the higher gross square footage schemes inevitably compromised bulk and massing objectives. Each scheme responded to marketing and land use forces acting on the area, e.g., major office concentration is located on the Arlington/Boylston corner as a continuation of the Back Bay office area. Finally, each scheme was analyzed in terms of its financial return, as related to the respective land costs. The financial analysis of the actual schemes provided a check that the relationship between reduced density and reduced land costs had been correctly maintained. Also, as this particular phase of the analysis was carried out by computer using the 'internal rate of return' method, the cash flow characteristics of each proposed development could be ascertained. This provided informatin important to the phasing of the project - a crucial aspect of multi-use proposals of the magnitude contemplated.

The need to understand the influence of land costs on the total development was crucial. As a consequence of the full-scale financial analysis, it became possible to reduce this variable to a rule of thumb: for first class office space, one square foot of developed rentable space could "absorb" $8 worth of land. Such relationships between developed

space and its land absorption factor were calculated for each separate use and class of use. The land absorption coefficient then provided a quick methodology for evaluating the economic feasibility of a large number of alternatives.

The planning objectives and alternatives were presented to, and received the endorsement of, the Park Plaza Design Advisory Committee (DAC). The DAC is a committee of three eminent outside architects, Araldo Cossutta of Cossutta-Ponte, Stewart Dawson of Sasaki Associates and Chip Harkness of The Architects Collaborative, appointed by the Director of the BRA to provide independent design advice. Lew Davis of Davis, Brody & Associates was involved throughout the restudy, thus insuring another level of both reality and insight into the work.

The Environmental Impact Statement

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) also proved to be a pioneering tool in planning Park Plaza. Usually an EIS is initiated to evaluate the impact of a specific project or action on the natural environment. In this case, the proposed action had yet to be determined, a number of alternatives were possible, and the environment in question was almost entirely urban or man-made.

The five alternatives for development - between 2 million and 6 million square feet - were what the environmental consultants tested. (Two of the alternatives - 6 and 3 million square feet -are shown in comparative elevation form in figure 13.)

The basic structure of the EIS was (1) identification and nature of issues, established by a complex matrix; (2) a description of the existing environment; (3) determination of the five development program alternatives together with the rental, population, economic and tax generation of each alternative; and (4) testing and evaluation, whereby the development programs were "inserted" into the existing environmental and economic context and any consequent changes in the environment and economic structure were described, measured, and evaluated.

The completed report is approximately 1,000 pages. It includes computer analysis of shadows cast on the Boston Common and Public Garden, wind tunnel analysis of ground level wind effects, and analyses of mass transit, utilities, plant life, soil conditions, noise and pollution. Also cost/benefit and marketing analyses were carried out for each of the five alternatives.

Two of the most significant of the impacts identified by the environmental review work were: (1) wind effects at the base of the office tower located at the junction of Arlington/Boylston Streets, and, (2) traffic congestion at several critical street intersections. Both impacts were only pronounced with respect to the 5 and 6 million square feet alternatives.

Other impacts could either be relieved by mitigating measures, or were open to interpretation, e.g., to what extent are winter shadows on the Boston Common/Garden detrimental to pedestrian users.

The conventional EIS is a passive document, prepared after the majority of the planning work has been done. In the case of Park Plaza, the EIS became a part of the planning process. By testing a range of alternatives, planning decisions could be made concurrent with the EIS work. Thus both the project planning and the EIS could progressively focus on an increasingly narrowly defined set of alternatives, and ultimately on one proposed plan and project. Data generated by the environmental work could be immediately utilized.

Perhaps the best example of this is the traffic analysis that was carried out with the traffic data - traffic counts, projections, corridor utilization, modal splits, etc. - that were generated for the EIS evaluations. With this data, it was possible to show that the traffic routed through the middle of the project area via New Providence Street in the initial plan (fig. 6) could, in fact, be accommodated on the peripheral streets without an overly serious loss of efficiency. The final plan shows the elimination of New Providence Street (fig. 7).

The limits of a new plan were by now generally agreed upon. The environmental work showed that there were problems with the 5 and 6 million square foot development. The urban design work showed that all public objectives could be feasibly achieved by development of the core area with around 3 to 4 million square feet of development, and it was a development of this size and in the core area location that all various actors in the Park Plaza industry began examining more closely.

The Actual Project

The work carried out to this point by the urban design staff and the environmental consultant had been largely hypothetical. If the final plan was to be convincing and approvable then it had to provide a set of actual development pieces. Energies were now concentrated on establishing a 'Proposed Project' to fit the emerging plan.

The problem location in the project area had always been the Eliot Street Garage parcel east of New Charles Street (fig. 11). This sub-parcel is closest to the Combat Zone, and it does not have the advantage of the more marketable Boylston Street frontage. It was further constrained by the elimination of the adjacent Piano Row sub-parcel from the lower density alternatives. The overall success of the Park Plaza project, furthermore, had always been considered to depend on the development of this sub-parcel both to anchor the eastern end of the project and to halt the spread of the Combat Zone into the area.

During a period of intense activity in May 1975, long-standing but still indefinite plans for a State Office Building that would consolidate all the State's transportation-related agencies (Department of Public Works, Massport, MBTA, etc.) was married to the Eliot Street Garage sub-parcel. A feasibility study for this building had previously been carried out by the architectural firm of Goody, Clancy & Associates. Some 16 potential sites in the Boston area had been examined but Park Plaza was not among them, due to the political controversy of the project. With the emergence of the new Park Plaza plan, the State Office Building feasibility report was analyzed to determine whether the proposed building could be compatible with the new plan.

The building program called for 10 floors of offices at a large (60,000 sq.ft.) area per floor. The State administration would have preferred the building to be located in the more desirable area west of New Charles Street, but investigation showed that available sites were not adequate in size. The Eliot Street Garage sub-parcel was the only site large enough to satisfy the program. So, with the decision to attempt to locate the State Office Building in Park Plaza and, more particularly, in the Eliot Street Garage sub-parcel, a viable development had been found for the most problematic area. A major catalyst had been introduced to trigger off the remaining development parcels.

Boston Urban Associates, the tentatively designated developer, now relaxed their insistence on a high-rise office block on the Arlington/ Boylston corner, on the basis that the State Office Building would act as an adequate anchor to the overall project. Davis, Brody & Associates became active in the shaping of the new project. Boston Urban also began negotiations with a luxury hotel chain for the development of a new low hotel along the Boylston Street frontage between Hadassah Way and New Charles Street, which would replace the previously assumed hotel tower associated with the Park Square location. With the State Office Building and the luxury hotel, the remaining pieces started to fall into place. The Motor Mart would be renovated and expanded into an 850-car parking garage to serve the parking needs of the project. A 300-unit apartment building was planned between the luxury hotel and the parking garage, which provided a residential component in the project. Lastly, a low-rise, large floor area office building would be permitted on the remaining Boylston Street frontage (the Arlington/ Boylston sub-parcel).

This proposed office building was the most dubious piece of the completed Park Plaza puzzle. Its financial feasibility would be marginal at best, and redevelopment of this sub-area serves no particular purpose other than tidying up the Boylston Street frontage. On the other hand, the sub-area would develop on a piecemeal basis if eminent domain powers were not used to consolidate land assembly; the high allowable FAR, high land costs and existing disparate property ownership could result in a haphazard and scaleless mixture of old and new. A mixed program

of rehabilitation of the better buildings plus controlled infill redevelopment would be the best planning solution - a solution too complex for the city's present planning controls to implement.

The 1976 proposed project as described above differs from the 2 to 6 million square foot alternatives developed as part of the environmental work, especially in land use. The EIS alternatives had, however, provided the key to density reduction, allowing the new proposed project to be designed with real development components and at a gross square footage of only 2.5 million square feet.

The proposed project meets all the requirements defined for the restudy. It conforms to all urban design and planning objectives, retains the more worthwhile existing buildings (Piano Row, Saxon Theater and the Motor Mart), satisfies the recommendations of the Civic Advisory Committee and produces no significant adverse environmental impacts. There is a price to be paid, however, which is an increased public capital expenditure outlay. The authorized city bond issue of $6.8 million that was initially approved in 1971 for the project allowed only for street improvements. The developer was to provide the remaining public amenities such as open space, gallerias, etc., as well as a deferred reimbursement of some of the initial $6.8 million. The 1976 proposal assumes that the major public amenity of the project - the plaza in the Park Square area - is to be built by the City at a cost of an additional $2 million, including land acquisition. Feasibility of the proposed project could only be assured by minimizing the excess amount of land that the luxury hotel and apartment tower would have to absorb. Given the vastly reduced scale of the project and the benefits of public control of the plaza, $2 million is a price worth paying.

The final Park Plaza plan is relatively simple; it imposes height and setback controls, locates pedestrian easements and open space and specifies very general land use. The proposed project, on the other hand, is much more complex and validates the plan. The proposed project could change radically, but the plan will remain.

Park Plaza is a mix of public and private actions. The public actions can be reasonably well controlled; the private actions can only be anticipated. It is the need to guess the course of private action that robs so many major planning activities of their value, a misfortune that befalls the many traditional planning reports which are often only valid on their date of printing.

The planning of Park Plaza included the tedious task of trying to anticipate all possible alternative private actions (and even then did not anticipate the final project). All the alternatives were tested for financial, economic and environmental soundness. The information and knowledge thus gathered were fed back into the piecing together of a real project and plan.

The exercise could not have been carried out if very considerable flexibility had not been maintained during the process - a flexibility which accommodated a continually changing input as the project slithered between political, community and development forces and a flexibility which will undoubtedly have to be continually maintained as future market conditions may suggest different uses. The essential components are a financial/ environmental testing framework and a professional staff available to respond quickly and at any point of the process.